

Birth control by delivery? New mobile app seeks to empower young people with access to tools

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An exciting new mobile application (app) that facilitates easy access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) tools and services for university students is under pilot testing in Kampala. Kagwilawo, meaning “instant” in Luganda, will link users to partner health facilities based on their location to either order tools for delivery or book a service at the health facility. Earlier this year, GHE Consulting was awarded funding through Grand Challenges Canada’s Stars in Global Health program to develop the new app.

Young people face myriad of barriers in accessing SRH tools and services, including distance to facility, cost, lack of knowledge, and high stigma associated with being sexually active. As a result, there is a high unmet need for contraception among youth in Uganda, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies resulting in unsafe abortions, and sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). These issues are faced by rural and urban communities alike.

Kagwilawo is designed to overcome these challenges by delivering tools directly to the client’s chosen drop-off location in discrete packaging, at a subsidized cost, or allowing the client to schedule an appointment for services directly with the clinic. This innovation not only bridges privacy and confidentiality for the poorest and most marginalized, but it also puts decision making power directly in the hands of the user.

In today’s instant-gratification world, young people need easier and more efficient ways to get what they need to maintain their health. “Kagwilawo was developed with this generation in mind, we want young people to feel empowered and in control of their reproductive decisions and health. We want people to have access to high-quality, low-cost services and tools that meet their needs,” said Elly Nuwamanya, Research Analyst and Principle Investigator for Kagwilawo.

While using mobile technology to improve access to crucial services and tools is not novel, the team is pioneering a sustainability model that depends on in-app advertisements to generate revenue that will pay for the subsidies.

Currently in its pilot phase, the app will link select college students at Kyambogo University campus to pharmacies and clinics within a set geographical area. Students will have the freedom to order tools for delivery or pick-up, such as condoms, birth control pills, or Panado, or book a service such as HIV or pregnancy testing. All of it is anonymous, utilizing user ID codes linked to phone numbers, meaning students never have to give their real names. If proven successful, the team hopes to scale the project on a national level.

"The goal here is increasing awareness and uptake," said Afra Nuwasiima, Statistical Analyst, "we hope Kagwilawo provides what young people need to make informed decisions and be proactive about their sexual and reproductive health."

About Grand Challenges Canada

The Grand Challenges Canada Stars in Global Health program, funded by the Government of Canada, supports Bold Ideas with Big Impact® from the best and brightest scientists and innovators, both in low- and middle-income countries and in Canada, to address some of the most pressing global health challenges. It provides funding to explore transformative ideas at proof-of-concept that apply Integrated Innovation® – the coordinated application of scientific/technological, social and business innovation – in order to sustainably bring solutions to scale. Stars in Global Health projects will receive CAD \$2.7 million in funding from Grand Challenges Canada, and will be complemented by dozens of partner contributions, as well as the collaboration of government and non-governmental agencies in each country, creating a total investment of \$3.9 million.

About GHE Consulting

GHE Consulting's mission is to improve the lives of people in sub-Saharan Africa through excellence in the conduct of health-related research to inform health policy, while nurturing and developing local analytic talent. We strive to cultivate a new generation of health analysts that will shape the future of economically-sound, evidence-based health policy in sub-Saharan Africa.